

May 25, 2006

The Honorable Peter Hoekstra
Chairman
Select Committee on Intelligence
U.S. House of Representatives
H-405, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jane Harman
Ranking Member
Select Committee on Intelligence
U.S. House of Representatives
H-405, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Hoekstra and Ranking Member Harman:

We are writing today to express our views on your Committee's deliberations over unauthorized disclosures of classified information and request that our comments be included in the record of the Committee's May 26, 2006 public hearing.

To be sure, leaks of classified information are a serious matter because some leaks can endanger national security. We recognize that the government has a legitimate interest in protecting our national security secrets, and the media have a responsibility to carefully consider the impact of its reporting. The question of when to publish or broadcast information, and when to withhold, is one that the media take very seriously. It has been our experience that the reception and reporting of information labeled "classified" is checked and triple checked at the highest possible levels for accuracy, context and, most important, prospective damage to national security. That process almost always involves discussions with appropriate government officials.

We understand that there has been discussion in Congress about changing the legal framework with respect to the unauthorized release of classified information. We urge the Committee to move forward with great caution in this area so as not to chill daily communications between government officials and the press. Congress in two World Wars, in the Cold War, and in the defense of this country from terrorism, has wisely resisted secrecy legislation that would infringe upon the public's right to stay informed on critical issues of the day.

Investigating and prosecuting those who leak information that causes serious harm to national security is understandable. However, a sweeping campaign to establish new, punitive legislation to crack down on leaks would create an authoritarian barrier between the public and the government. It would severely hamper the ability of journalists to do their jobs, which ultimately is to assure the government is accountable to the people it serves.

We encourage the Committee to resist any action that would put in jeopardy the free flow of information – an essential component of our democracy.

Sincerely,

Tom Brokaw

Walter Cronkite

Ted Koppel